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ABSTRACT

The political issues and activities involved in the reporting of results of the 1969-70 Michigan Educational Assessment Program are discussed. The background and purposes of the program, the events and forces that shaped the manner in which assessment results were reported, and several political issues regarding the design of the 1970-71 educational assessment program are discussed. The authors were involved in administering the program and they present an overview of the political implications involved in state-level educational policy-making. Insights into the problems connected with state assessment programs from the standpoint of the local school district, the state legislature, the state executive branch, as well as interested citizens are provided. Finally, the stages involved that brought about a modification of reporting policy by the Michigan Department of Educatiсn are presented. (AE)

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THE MICHIGAN ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATION, 1969-70: THE POLITICS OF REPORTING RESULTS

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Michigan Department of Education

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Introduction

> The /program/ is really politics masquerading as research. Promise after promise has been broken. Plans have been dictated and changed by the Legislature . . . . It is not an operational purpose of the assessment project to improve instruction by identifying promising practices . . . . The conclusions were written before the project was undertaken . . . . Educators at the district level have not been included in designing the tests and are not included in plans for the development of future tests.[1]

In such fashion, did the central curriculum staff of one of Michigan's suburban school districts view the implementation of the 1969-70 Michigan Educational Assessment Program. Perhaps no program administered by the Michigan Department of Education has received more publicity or been the center of as much political controversy as its educational assessment program.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the political issues and activities surrounding an instance of state-level educational policy-making. Specifically, the paper will: (1) briefly outline the background

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[1] Department of Instruction, Grosse Pointe Public Schools, "The Michigan Assessment of Basic Skills: A Summary of Concerns," October 6, 1970.

and purposes of the 1969-70 assessment program; (2) discuss events and forces that shaped the manner in which 1969-70 educational assessment results were reported; and (3) briefly discuss several political issues regarding the design of the 1970-71 educational assessment program.

Two additional matters should be noted by way of introduction. First, the writers of this paper have been—and continue to be—involved in administering the Michigan Educational Assessment Program and, therefore, cannot be considered as unbiased observers. The writers no doubt suffer from the problem of personal bias, the problem of paying heed to convention and good taste, and from what Gottschalk has termed "egocentrism"—namely, the tendency of even a modest participant observer to recount his words and actions as if they were the most important things said and done.[2]

Second, the paper represents an overview or "broad brushstroke" attempt to identify and describe certain of the key events and activities surrounding the administration of the assessment program. No claim can be made that the paper represents the results of a systematic study of educational policymaking. A great deal of the documentary evidence regarding the assessment program was, of course, available to the writers. However, no systematic attempt was made to interview the many participants in the assessment process and, as Bailey has pointed out, live sources should be used in a study of policymaking for ". . . what is committed to writing represents only the seventh of the iceberg above water."[3]

The Background and Purposes of the Assessment Effort

The Genesis of the 1969-70 Program

In late 1968, three staff members within the Bureau of Research of the

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[2] Louis Gottschalk, Understanding History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), pp. 148-160.

[3] Stephen K. Bailey, Congress Makes a Law (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), p. x.

Michigan Department of Education began to discuss the lack of reliable information concerning the level, distribution, and progress of education in the State. These discussions led to the development of a staff paper which outlined the problem and proposed that the Department undertake what would be a pioneering effort in Michigan—the development and implementation of a statewide educational assessment program. Although such a proposal represented a radical step for the Department (and for Michigan) and was fraught with potential controversy, the proposal was received with considerable enthusiasm and supported by both the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education.[4] In addition—perhaps because of the tenor of the times and the rising concern over the need for "accountability" in education—the idea received the support and endorsement of the State Legislature and the Governor; and, of course, it was the Legislature that gave it life by providing the mandate and funds necessary to implement the program.

While statewide assessment had its proponents, it also had its share of opponents—and resultant political problems. Consequently, there were a host of events and activities of a political nature which surrounded the development and initial implementation of the 1969-70 program. The active political participants included the Department, the Legislature, the Governor's Office, the press, the schools, professional education groups, parent and citizen groups, and individuals. And the activities of these agencies, groups, and individuals exerted considerable influence—both directly and indirectly—on the shape and direction of the 1969-70 assessment program.

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[4]For an overview of the 1969-70 effort, see: C. Philip Kearney, Robert L. Crowson, and Thomas P. Wilbur, "Improved Information for Educational Decision-Making: The Michigan Assessment Program," Administrator's Notebook, Vol. XVIII, No. 6, February, 1970.

However, since these several activities have been described at length elsewhere,[5] we will not recount them in this paper. Rather, we offer these general observations as background and as an indication that the assessment program was surrounded—from its inception—by considerations of a political nature.

The Purposes of the 1969-70 Program

The first public report in the Michigan educational assessment series made the assumption that "the most important education-related problem facing the State—and indeed the nation—is the inequitable distribution of school district performance levels and their correlates."[6] Several studies have been conducted in Michigan that indicate that some school systems are able to provide their students with higher quality educational programs than other systems. For example, the 1967 Michigan School Finance Study, proposed by the State Board of Education and supported by the State Legislature, indicated that affluent school systems provide their students with more special classes, programs and curricula, more qualified instructional staffs, and better facilities than the less affluent districts.[7] Guthrie and others, in a 1969 study, found a positive relationship between the social status of children and provision of school services that held—in Michigan—for school districts, individual schools, and individual students. They concluded that, in general, "High quality school services are provided to children from wealthy homes. Poor quality school services are provided to children from poor homes."[8]

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[5]C. Philip Kearney, "The Politics of Educational Assessment in Michigan," Planning and Changing, Vol. I, No. 2, July, 1970.

[6]Purposes and Procedures of the Michigan Assessment of Education (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, Assessment Report No. 1, 1969), p. 2.

[7]J. Alan Thomas, School Finance and Educational Opportunity in Michigan (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, 1968).

[8]James W. Guthrie et al., Schools and Inequality: A Study of Social Status, School Services, Student Performance, and Post School Opportunity in Michigan (No publication place: The Urban Coalition, 1969), p. 91.

This concern, then, was uppermost in the minds of those responsible for the initial design of the 1969-70 assessment program. The basic purpose of the program was to provide members of the State Board of Education and the Legislature with information needed for allocating the State's educational resources in a manner best calculated to equalize and improve the quality of educational opportunities for all children in the State.

In order to achieve this basic purpose, the 1969-70 assessment program was designed to answer four questions:

1. For the State as a whole, what are the present levels of educational performance and the levels of certain factors related to performance?

2. For Michigan's geographic regions and community types, what are the present levels of educational performance and the levels of certain factors related to performance?

3. Do schools that score high (or low or average) on certain factors related to performance also score high (or low or average) on the performance measures?

4. What changes over time may be noted in the answers to the previous three questions?

It should be apparent to the reader that the 1969-70 Michigan Educational Assessment Program, as originally conceived and carried out, was concerned primarily with providing information to state-level decision makers. While there was a parallel purpose—to assist local school districts in their efforts to identify needs and priorities as they plan and administer local school programs—this was viewed as secondary or subsidiary to the main purpose. As we will indicate in the final section of this paper, the relative emphases on these two purposes underwent considerable reshuffling following the administration of the 1969-70 program.

The Reporting of 1969-70 Results

As we already have implied, one of the major limitations in any statewide assessment effort arises from the political considerations inherent in this

type of undertaking. "Accountability" is essentially a political word; and assessment programs are essentially political programs. By this we don't mean that they are essentially "evil" (as no doubt the authors of our opening quote would hold); we mean simply that they must serve competing groups. Consequently, the persons or agency charged with developing, implementing, and reporting the results of a statewide assessment program must pay heed to the interests of these competing groups. This problem is perhaps best illustrated by recounting, in some detail, the evolution of the Department's policy regarding the public reporting of results.

Whether or not to report publicly, by school district, the comparative results of the assessment effort was an issue that plagued the program from its inception. (It also is an issue which has plagued, and continues to plague the National Assessment effort—albeit the issue there is whether or not to report comparative data by states.) On the one hand, there is the argument that such reporting serves no good purpose and, because of misinterpretation, leads to so-called "invidious comparisons." On the other hand, there is the argument that such data should be public information and that the public—as well as the Legislature—has a right to know how their schools are doing. Legislators and state officials generally seem to favor—and indeed expect—that there will be public disclosure of comparative data. School people—superintendents, administrators, and teachers—generally oppose public disclosure of the results. Parents and students—at least in Michigan—have yet to come out strongly on either side of the issue, although there is a growing indication that parents favor public disclosure once they become aware that comparative data on performance is available. The press, of course, generally advocates public disclosure of the data.

In the initial design of the 1969-70 assessment program, the Department

attempted to strike a compromise on the issue by establishing a three-part policy on reporting. First, the assessment program was designed to gather data not only on performance or "output" measures, but also to gather data on the conditions or circumstances under which each district operated. These "input" factors included measures for each district of its financial resources, its human resources (the teaching staff), the socio-economic level of the children served, and the attitudes and aspirations of these children. The intent of this effort, of course, was to provide data in such fashion that "outputs" always would be interpreted in relation to "inputs."[9]

Second, the school districts of the State were categorized into one of five community types and into one of four geographic regions. Thus, comparisons could be made among community types and among geographic regions, as well as among combinations of the two—for example, large urban districts as compared to suburban districts, or city school districts in Northern Michigan as compared to city school districts in Southeastern Michigan. Under this arrangement, no single school district would need to be identified publicly.[10]

Third, the Department stated publicly that it would neither prepare nor publish any ranking of Michigan school districts based on 1969-70 assessment results.[11] In effect, the Department had gone on record as stating it would not release data on individual local school districts to anyone but local school administrators—unless forced to do so by external factors.[12] In

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[9] Purposes and Procedures of the Michigan Assessment of Education, op. cit., pp. 2-3, 7.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid, p. 7.

[12] This policy was arrived at not by formal action of the State Board of Education, but by an in-house decision reached by several top administrators in the Department, including the State Superintendent. The State Board, however, gave tacit approval to this policy when it adopted and caused to be distributed Assessment Report No. 1: Purposes and Procedures of the Michigan Assessment of Education.

reaching this decision, Department staff recognized that, if put to the test, they might well have to rescind this policy or, at least, considerably modify it. Subsequent events did indeed dictate that it be modified.

The first public report of 1969-70 assessment results was distributed on June 24, 1970.[13] This report was followed by an additional report released during the month of September.[14] In addition, a local district report was sent to each of Michigan's public school districts during the latter part of August, 1970.[15] This report included the actual assessment scores for each local district—each district, of course, receiving data only on its schools. (In the letter accompanying the local district report, the State Superintendent encouraged each superintendent to make the information public.)

When it was made known that the local districts had received their individual results, there immediately arose pressure from several sources calling on the Department to provide, in one document, comparative data on all the schools in the State, or at least on the schools in any given region. There were, first of all, requests from the press to make such data available. In these instances, the press was urged to contact the local superintendent or superintendents directly and request the data. The strongest pressures for release of comparative data came from state government—in the persons of the Governor and State Legislators. A final factor that influenced modification of the reporting policies was the passage of Section 3 of the State School Aid Act. This section

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[13] Levels of Educational Performance and Related Factors in Michigan (Lansing, Michigan: Department of Education, Assessment Report No. 4, 1970).

[14] Distribution of Educational Performance and Related Factors in Michigan (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, Assessment Report No. 5, 1970).

[15] Local District Report (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, Assessment Report No. 6, 1970).

called for a categorical aid program aimed at allocating $17.5 million to Michigan schools based on the results of the 1969-70 assessment effort.

Requests from the Governor's Office

The Governor was extremely interested in, and supportive of the assessment concept. It was the Governor who, on August 12, 1969, affixed his signature to the budget bill that included $250,000 for the Department's 1969-70 assessment program.[16] And it was the Governor who, during the 1970 session of the Legislature, introduced, supported, and subsequently signed into law Act No. 38 of the Public Acts of 1970 which, while it changed the thrust of the program somewhat, gave the assessment effort its own basis in statute.[17]

Because certain of the Governor's policy and program staff wanted access to the 1969-70 assessment results, the Department received a request for a single report containing comparative assessment data on all Michigan school districts. How was a state agency—which, although independent of the Governor, was a branch of the executive arm of government—going to respond to the legitimate request of the Governor, in view of the fact that that agency had a stated policy which held that no ranking of individual districts would be

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[16] While the State Board of Education had the power to mandata a statewide assessment program, the program also required a relatively high level of funding—and the only source of such funds was the Legislature. Two possibilities existed: (1) seek the introduction of a new piece of legislation which would not only mandate the program but also provide the necessary funds; or (2) establish the program and acquire the funds through the simple expedient of having a line item added to the Department's annual budget for operations. Both alternatives, of course, required legislative approval, but the latter had the advantage of not treating the program as an entirely new and separate legislative issue. Thus in seeking initial legislation, the decision was made to go the route of asking for a line item addition—along with the necessary language—to the Department's budget bill.

[17] Act No. 38 of the Public Acts of 1970, State of Michigan.

prepared or made available outside the Department? And if the data were made available to the Governor's Office, how could the same data be refused to legislative committees, individual legislators, or—for that matter—individual citizens? The Department then was faced with the first challenge to its existing policy on releasing assessment results.

Requests from the Legislature

Nor were legislators hesitant to throw forward their challenge. In the packet of materials which constituted the local district report, there were included: (1) tables of normative data and explanatory materials prepared to assist superintendents in the interpretation of their school district's scores; and (2) the actual scores on all assessment measures for the district and for each of the schools in the district.[18] The explanatory materials also included data for a hypothetical district—Michville—to assist superintendents in interpreting the scores of their own districts.

The local reports—together with actual score data for each individual district—were sent to all local superintendents on August 20, 1970. At the same time, a copy—minus any actual data on school districts—was sent to each member of the Legislature. And, of course, each legislator previously had received copies of the two public reports on assessment results. While the public reports—which did not identify individual school districts—produced little reaction among legislators, the release of the local reports brought on a torrent of requests by legislators for actual data on "their districts." The requests were made both formally and informally, by letter, by telephone, and word-of-mouth. These requests produced tremendous pressures on the Department to release the data—as well as counter pressures from local school people not to release the data. The Department was under fire from the State Legislature to make available immediately comparative data for all Michigan

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18 Local District Report, op. cit.

school districts on the results of the 1969-70 assessment program. The Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee wanted the data, the House Appropriations Committee wanted the data, the House Education Committee wanted the data, the House Special Committee on the Quality of Elementary and Secondary Schools wanted the data, the Legislative Fiscal Agency wanted the data, and several individual legislators wanted the data for "their districts." In addition, there was considerable sentiment among individual members of the State Board of Education that public disclosure of the data should be made.[19] The Department was caught squarely between the interests of competing groups—on the one hand legislators and other state officials who demanded the data, and on the other hand local school personnel who felt they had been assured that no such disclosures would be made.

While the Department recognized the gravity of the situation, staff were reluctant to arbitrarily reverse the policy that originally had been set, i.e., no ranking or public release of data on individual districts. Therefore, in an attempt to gain time and yet meet the concerns of both legislators who wanted the data and schoolmen who didn't want them to have it, the Department undertook a review of its reporting policies. However, legislators were not content to wait. The pressures that built up for releasing the data can perhaps best be understood by recounting, in some detail, the actual correspondence that took place between one particularly impatient legislator and Department staff. Upon receiving a copy of the local district report—minus any actual scores on districts in his area—the legislator wrote to the Director of the Bureau of Research as follows:

> . . . regretfully I have not yet received the scores for my school districts.
>
> I am not concerned with Michville. Therefore at your earliest convenience please provide me with my local school districts' tables and scores. My districts are: . . . .

[19] Personal conversations with individual members of the State Board of Education.

> I regret the Department has not provided the Legislature with this relevant information. I am sure you would agree that there is nothing secretive about it, and this is merely an oversight on the part of the Department.[20]

The Director of the Bureau of Research responded as follows:

> Thank you for your letter . . . regarding release of local district assessment scores. The Superintendent of Public Instruction was recently authorized to explore the releasing of local results to legislators. Therefore, /he/ is discussing the release of data from the local schools with the appropriate local administrators and will write you shortly regarding this matter.[21]

However, the legislator would have none of this and wrote back:

> Thank you for your letter . . . in response to mine . . . in which I requested that you forward to me my local school district assessment scores. You indicated that /the State Superintendent/ is discussing the release of this data with appropriate local school administrators and will communicate shortly regarding this matter.
>
> . . . I cannot stress too strongly my shock and amazement at this tactic. Whether or not local school administrators wish to have this information released to legislators is no concern of mine nor should it be of the Department's. As a legislator, it is my position that I have an absolute right to the test data.
>
> . . . Secrecy and the withholding of information is a classic bureaucratic technique which has no place in a free society. I am not unmindful of the reasons the Department will attempt to put forth as to why such scores should remain secret, and I am unconvinced by them.
>
> Therefore I expect by return mail the test results of my school districts.[22]

Facing the inevitable, the State Superintendent entered the picture at this point and wrote to the legislator in question:

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[20] Letter from a member of the Michigan House of Representatives, September 4, 1970.

[21] Letter from the Deputy Associate Superintendent for Research, September 30, 1970.

[22] Letter from a member of the Michigan House of Representatives, October 9, 1970.

> I received a carbon copy of your letter to /the Director/. Let me assure you our office does provide the test data to legislators. /The Director's/ reference to our office establishing a procedure for releasing such data goes back to a previous commitment which indicated, in the initial assessment document, that this information would not be made available. The State Board of Education has since that time modified that position.[23]

In turn, the legislator's response to the Superintendent was brief:

> I am delighted with your response to my inquiry concerning test scores for my area schools. I am pleased that the Board has this kind of policy.
>
> P.S. When can I expect the test scores for my area schools?[24]

However, the legislator did see fit to further drive home his point in a letter, written one day later, to the staff member concerned—and, of course, with a copy to the State Superintendent:

> Yesterday's /local newspaper/ carried a most interesting story in which our Superintendent of Schools discussed at some length the test scores for /his/ students. While this makes interesting reading, I would still prefer to have a report from your Department.
>
> I would greatly appreciate it if you could find time in your busy day to forward me this information, as per /the Superintendent's letter/ . . . Perhaps if you communicated less with my local superintendent concerning this problem, you would be able to stuff an envelope with this information in thirty seconds.
>
> I intend to amend the law next year to make it mandatory that legislators receive this information prior to the Department of Education's releasing it to the superintendents. If you play the game that way, we'll just change the ground rules.[25]

The final chapter in this episode was written by the State Superintendent in

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[23] Letter from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, October 13, 1970.

[24] Letter from a member of the Michigan House of Representatives, October 15, 1970.

[25] Letter from a member of the Michigan House of Representatives, October 16, 1970.

two letters—a week apart. The first letter, dated on the same day as the legislator's final letter to the Director of the Bureau of Research, read as follows:

> As per your request, I am pleased to indicate that consistent with the State Board of Education's policy of September 8, and procedures which we are formulating, I have obtained a copy of the Michigan basic skills printout for /the school districts in the legislator's area/. . . .
>
> I also wish to inform you that staff has discussed the release of this data with /the local superintendents concerned/ and each of them has assured staff that they would be most pleased to have their representative staff sit down with you and discuss this data in greater detail.
>
> As you may know, the first document prepared on the Assessment Program indicated to school districts that this information would not be released to the public. However, due to changes in Section 3, and to the advice of the Attorney General's office, we are now aware of the fact that such information cannot be withheld, especially from public officials. I would, however—and I need not share this with you—indicate that we are moving cautiously in this area because of the great deal of concern of local school officials regarding comparisons that might be made among districts without a full explanation.[26]

The legislator, upon receipt of the above letter and the results for "his districts," acknowledged the Department's efforts and thanked the State Superintendent for his assistance. The State Superintendent then wrote his final letter:

> Thank you for your letter . . . indicating to me that you received the test score results.
>
> As you know, I made the recommendation to provide such information to public officials to the State Board of Education. . . I have been criticized by school officials as a result of taking this position. Consequently there is no one who would be more pleased with a legislative act authorizing the distribution of these scores, and thereby clarifying this issue, than myself.[27]

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[26] Letter from the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, October 16, 1970.

[27] Ibid., October 23, 1970.

Copies of this letter were sent to members of the State Board of Education, members of the House Education Committee, the Chairman and leading minority member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, the Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, the Chairman and leading minority representative of the House Appropriations Committee, and the staff assistant to the Speaker of the House.

This turn of events was greeted with mixed reactions from local school district administrators. Some saw it as inevitable and chose to remind Department staff that "we told you so." Others were greatly disturbed and viewed this turn of events as a chameleon trick on the part of the Department, as witnessed in one of the letters received from the local district level:

> The complete breaking of trust between the State Department of Education and the local districts in terms of releasing 1969-70 scores /on assessment/ is extremely unethical.[28]

This change in reporting policies also brought against the Department the charge referred to in the opening lines of this paper:

> The /Michigan Educational Assessment Program/ is really politics masquerading as research. Promise after promise has been broken. Plans have been dictated and changed by the Legislature . . . .[29]

Section 3 of the State School Aid Act

While the main pressure for a change in reporting policies emanated from the many requests for data by individual legislators or by committees of the Legislature, there was an additional turn of events which served to reinforce the decision to publicly release the results of the 1969-70 assessment. During the 1968 session of the Legislature, there was added to the State School Aid Act a section which established a categorical aid program aimed at assisting

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[28] Letter from a local school district superintendent, October 25, 1970.

[29] Department of Instruction, Grosse Pointe Public Schools, op. cit.

those schools marked by a "high degree of economic and cultural deprivation." On the basis of criteria established by the Department of Education, certain schools became eligible for funding and some $6.3 million in additional aid was allocated to forty-seven Michigan schools during the academic year 1968-69.[30] The program, employing the same criteria, was continued at a higher level during the 1969-70 school year. In the 1970-71 School Aid Act, the Legislature saw fit to again raise the level of funding—to $17.5 million—but they also changed the criteria.

Section 3 of the 1970-71 State School Aid Act requires the employment of two criteria to determine eligibility for funding. The criteria require that, within attendance areas of individual schools, there is enrolled: (1) a high percentage of students with socio-economic deprivation; and (2) a high percentage of students with low achievement levels. The legislation further provides that the results of the 1969-70 statewide assessment effort for grade 4 be employed to determine a school's relative standing on these two criteria. A school falling in the bottom quartile on composite achievement received points in relation to its rank within that quartile—one point if it were at the 25th percentile, twenty-five points if it fell at the 1st percentile. In addition, a school falling in the bottom quartile on relative socio-economic level also received points—from one point to ten points, depending upon its percentile ranking.[31]

This legislation, of course, had a direct impact on the Department's policy regarding release of assessment results. The legislation—in effect—

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[30] A Description and Evaluation of Section 3 Projects in Michigan, 1968-69 (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, 1969), p. 1.

[31] Act 100 of the Public Acts of 1970, State of Michigan, Chapter 1, Section 3.

required that the Department prepare a ranking of all schools in the State and, in addition, be prepared to publicly release the point scores (and thus the relative standing) of all schools falling in the bottom quartile on two of the assessment measures—composite achievement and relative socio-economic level. Thus, for practical purposes, the Section 3 legislation removed from the jurisdiction of the Department the question of whether or not assessment results would be released publicly.

This turn of events, in addition to the pressures resulting from legislative and gubernatorial requests for data, left the Department with no alternative but to modify its policy—the entreaties of local school personnel notwithstanding. Individual district scores were made available to legislators and other public officials. And what may be of greater import, the Department is now preparing for public release in the immediate future, a district-by-district summary of the results of the 1969-70 assessment program. Through the use of standard scores and percentile rankings, the summary will identify the relative standing of each of Michigan's local school districts on all 1969-70 assessment measures.

As a final "hardening" of the new policy, the State Board of Education has stated that it intends to publicly release local assessment results from the 1970-71 program:

> The controversial statewide "educational assessment" testing program is being revamped for next year to make the results more useful and more public.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The State Board of Education intends to publicly release local assessment results, rather than relying on local districts to voluntarily publicize results for their schools.
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> . . . . . .
>
> The State Board itself will release all local results this time because of new state . . . legislation requiring at least some of the data to be made public and apparently because of

> feeling that some local school boards and superintendents weren't voluntarily releasing all the information.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . the State Board and some legislators have long wanted to ensure that all pertinent data would be released, to help parents and taxpayers get a better idea of how well their students are doing compared with other districts.[32]

The Reporting Design for 1970-71

We have discussed at some length certain political forces and events that shaped the manner in which the 1969-70 assessment results were reported. We have seen that, as a result of political pressures emanating primarily from the Legislature, the Department of Education was forced to move from its initial policy of not identifying individual districts to a new policy that provides for the public disclosure of local assessment results—both in terms of the 1969-70 program as well as the upcoming 1970-71 program and all future programs.

An additional series of events have led to even further re-shaping of the program for 1970-71; and this change also centers around the manner in which assessment results will be reported. As we indicated earlier, the initial designers of the Michigan assessment program were concerned primarily with providing information useful for making state-level decisions regarding the allocation or distribution of educational resources. The 1969-70 program was designed so that the basic—or smallest—unit of analysis was a school building. The SES measure, the attitude measures, and the performance measures were constructed to yield reliable scores for groups of pupils—not for individual pupils. Consequently, no reporting of individual pupil results was made—nor was any such reporting possible.

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[32] William E. Cote, "Major Changes Made in Disputed Pupil Testing Plan" (The State Journal, December 16, 1970).

Many persons—including local school district officials as well as the Governor—were not satisfied with a program that did not deliver individually reliable pupil scores nor furnish local school personnel with information needed to construct better programs or curricula for children.[33] While local educators generally agreed that the assessment program might furnish information that could aid in bringing about a more equitable allocation of educational resources, they were more concerned with acquiring information that would help them in designing or re-designing programs for the children in their local schools. They felt strongly that the assessment program should give equal emphasis to providing data useful for making local program decisions. In addition, they felt a need to be able to report individual pupil results to teachers, parents, and the pupils themselves.

This concern was echoed—and given great visibility—by none other than the Governor of the State. As a result of the work of his Commission on Educational Reform,[34] Governor Milliken was intent on the passage of legislation that would not only give a solid statutory base to the assessment effort, but also ensure that the program would be designed to identify individual students "who have extraordinary need for assistance to improve their competence in the basic skills."[35] Remedial assistance programs, funded by the State, were then to be made available to local districts to raise the basic skills competencies of the pupils identified.[36] This legislation did

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[33]See, for example: Department of Instruction, Grosse Pointe Public Schools, op. cit.

[34]See Report of the Governor's Commission on Educational Reform (Lansing, Michigan: September, 1970); and also Michigan, House of Representatives, Special Session of 1969, HB 3886.

[35]Michigan, House of Representatives, op. cit.

[36]Ibid.

become law and, thus, the question of whether to continue with measures reliable only for groups or to move to measures reliable for individual pupils become moot.[37] The passage of the legislation, reinforced by the expressed desires of local school personnel, dictated that the two basic purposes of the assessment program would receive equal emphasis in 1970-71. Thus, the assessment effort was re-designed and the 1970-71 program will report information that should prove useful not only in making allocatory decisions, but also in developing improved educational curricula and individualized programs at the local level.[38]

A Final Word

In this paper we have attempted to identify and describe certain key events and activities that caused the Michigan Department of Education to redefine its policy and procedures for reporting the results of the 1969-70 Educational Assessment Program. We also have discussed briefly the factors that led the Department to modify its reporting design for the 1970-71 assessment program. These modifications, while brought about by pressures of a political nature, hopefully will improve the program and provide more meaningful information to all competing groups and powers concerned. Undoubtedly, there will be subsequent events and activities that may further shape Michigan's posture toward statewide assessment and the reporting of assessment results. For, as we have seen, any statewide assessment effort is—and has to be—bound up in considerations of a political nature and, as such, must continue to serve the needs of competing groups if it is to survive.

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[37] See Act no. 38, Public Acts of 1970, State of Michigan.

[38] For an overview of the 1970-71 program, see: Objectives and Procedures of the 1970-71 Michigan Educational Assessment Program (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan Department of Education, Assessment Report No. 7, 1970).